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## COMMITTEE STATEMENT

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### Opening Statement of Rep. Scott Fitzgerald at Civil Rights and Human Services Subcommittee Hearing on Ending Child Hunger: June 10, 2021

(As prepared for delivery)

"Thank you Chairwoman Bonamici. And thank you for calling this hearing on child nutrition.

The past year has shown the real, active role hunger can play in a child's life. We've witnessed real hunger, the one where a child is forced to go without a meal because the cupboards are empty. And we've watched as our children hungered for in-person learning, and the nation hungered for cures, information, and a vaccine.

As we begin discussions on the reauthorization of the child nutrition laws, I'd like to keep that in perspective – hunger is a verb, and it can affect the entire trajectory of a child's life.

Children experiencing hunger perform worse academically. Forty six percent of students from low-income families say that hunger negatively impacts their academic performance, and studies substantiate that claim. Families dealing with hunger are more likely to have a child with lower math scores or repeat a grade.

And while studies and data are important in constructing good policy, it does not take a scientist to know that children thrive when they have access to nutritious meals. We also know that schools are more than just places to learn. The pandemic and related school closures highlighted the important roles schools play in helping all children, particularly those from low-income families, establish a routine and escape any stressors that await them at home.

That is why, when school closures threatened children's access to healthy meals during the academic year, the federal government worked in a bipartisan manner to ensure that school-aged children continued to receive this vital resource. This was the right decision in an emergency, and it was encouraging to see everyone work together in this time of need.

But as the pandemic winds down and schools reopen, we too must shift our attention away from heavy-handed federal intervention and towards supporting local school districts as they work to administer and, in many cases, essentially restart their school meal programs.

Any reauthorization of the child nutrition laws must involve local school officials and private partners, who know best what their students need and are positioned to deliver healthy meals in an effective manner. That means establishing rules that are easy for schools to follow and allowing them to serve meals that students will eat. It also means addressing the current standards in place and making the needed reforms so kids will in fact eat their healthy meals. Through some of these reasonable reforms, we can work with our partners to create good food that will not go to waste. For example, we can help more children get the benefits of milk if we apply a little common sense and allow schools to serve low-fat flavored milk with their meal or ensure the sodium limits don't prohibit serving cheese at lunch.

Similarly, we must refrain from creating new, duplicative programs and instead focus on improving existing programs to better serve students most in need, especially those in rural communities. I hope we can all work together and make some good changes to programs like the Summer Food Service Program, Farm to School, and other existing programs to address the gaps in service that exist before we just layer on new programs.

I am hopeful that as we keep these priorities in mind – providing healthy meals that students will eat, allowing wholesome foods like cheese to remain on students' plates, and reforming existing programs to address gaps in coverage – that we can arrive at a bipartisan solution that puts students, not politics, at the forefront.

Thank you to our witnesses for taking time out of your day to discuss this important issue, I look forward to hearing from you all.

I yield back. "

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